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Remarks:

The amendments above and these remarks are responsive to the non-final Office action dated May 2, 2007, and are being filed under 37 C.F.R. § 1.111.

Prior to entry of this Amendment, claims 1-24 were pending in the application. In the Office action, the Examiner rejected each of the pending claims under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over a combination of references. Applicant traverses the rejections, contending that each of the pending claims is patentable over the cited references, taken alone or in combination.

Nevertheless, to expedite the issuance of a patent, and to more particularly point out and distinctly claim aspects of the invention that applicant would like to patent now, applicant (1) has canceled claims 8, 10, and 19 without prejudice, and (2) has amended each of the independent claims, namely, claims 1, 9, 17, 20, and 22. Applicant reserves the right to pursue the subject matter of any of the canceled claims and/or of any of the amended claims in original form at a later time. Furthermore, applicant has presented remarks showing that claims 1-7, 9, 11-18, and 20-24 are patentable over the cited references.

Accordingly, in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks, applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the application and allowance of all of the pending claims.

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I. Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 103

The Examiner rejected each of the pending claims under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0059318 to Nomura ("Nomura") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,965,449 to Sugiyama ("Sugiyama"). Applicant traverses the rejections, contending that all of the claims are patentable in their original form. Nevertheless, for the reasons set forth above, applicant has amended independent claims 1, 9, 17, 20, and 22; and has canceled claims 8, 10, and 19 without prejudice. All of the claims are patentable at least for the reasons set forth below.

A. Claims 1-7

Independent claim 1 is directed to a method and, as amended, reads as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of restricting execution of user requests for printing data, comprising:

defining a set of one or more restricted user requests, such restricted user requests being restricted according to characteristics associated with such restricted user requests;

receiving a user request having a characteristic;

determining whether the received user request is included in the set of one or more restricted user requests based on the characteristic of the received user request; [[and]]

receiving an authorization indicator before printing data associated with the received user request having the characteristic when the received user request is included in the set of one or more restricted user requests; and

suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic for printing data associated with the received user request if the received user request is determined to be included in the set of one or more restricted user requests.

Support for the amendments to claim 1 is provided by the application as filed, such as by canceled claim 8. In the Office action, the Examiner rejected claim 1 as being obvious over a combination of Nomura and Sugiyama. Applicant traverses the rejection because it would not have been obvious to combine the cited references to produce the claimed invention, and because the cited references, taken alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest every element of claim 1. For example, the cited references do not teach or suggest a step of "suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic for printing data associated with the received user request if the received user request is determined to be included in the set of one or more restricted user requests."

Nomura relates to an image forming/processing system. The system is disclosed to be capable of restricting image output by judging whether or not the system is being used for its intended purpose, for example, being used to generate image output for business or private use. Nomura also discloses that a print job may be restricted based on the environment in which the print job is received (e.g., the time of day), data format, image attributes, and the application used to create print data. Furthermore, in some embodiments, Nomura involves changing the form of the printed output from that specified by the print job if the print job is restricted. For example, Nomura discloses printing a color image as black-and-white or monochromatic rather than in color (page 6, paragraph [0104]). However, in Nomura the change in form of the printed output from a color image to black-and-white or monochromatic is imposed by the system unilaterally without allowing a user any opportunity to decide whether or not the changed form of the printed output is desirable over no printed output. Accordingly, the

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system of Nomura wastes print consumables unnecessarily. In contrast, claim 1 recites "suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic for printing data" if the user request is determined to be restricted, which may provide the user with the option to decide whether the data should be printed according to the alternative characteristic or not printed at all.

In the Office action, in rejecting dependent claim 8, which is somewhat comparable to amended claim 1, the Examiner asserted that Nomura discloses "suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic" and cited paragraphs [0079] to [0082] of Nomura. Applicant disagrees. The cited paragraphs do not involve suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic for printing data. Paragraphs [0079] to [0082] all relate to whether or not a restriction mechanism of the system is operative, that is, whether or not to impose restrictions at all. In particular, paragraphs [0079] to [0081] relate to turning off or overriding the restriction mechanism in the presence of an administrator of a network or office, such that restrictions are not imposed on print jobs that would normally be restricted. Paragraph [0082] relates to allowing a user "to choose whether to impose restrictions or not on a print job." The user can enable or disable the restriction mechanism by selecting or not selecting a restriction mode for restricting a print job. If the restriction mode is selected, "some restrictions are imposed on the print job for the image forming device, for example, by data format, image attributes, and applications." On the other hand, "the print job for the image forming device is allowed without special restrictions when the restriction mode is not selected." In other words, "in a network environment and under various conditions" the "user" of Nomura acts like an

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administrator to determine whether or not the restriction mechanism is active. In contrast, claim 1 recites "suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic," for a user request that has already been determined to be restricted, that is, on which a restriction already has been imposed. Accordingly, Nomura does not teach or suggest every element of claim 1.

Sugiyama relates to a printing system, information processor, and authenticating method. The system, processor, and method involve managing the use of a printer according to the departments to which users belong. Sugiyama discloses user authentication by asking a user to enter a department ID and password into an input area. If not authenticated, printing may be restricted. However, Sugiyama does not involve "suggesting an alternative, unrestricted characteristic," and was cited in the Office action only in regard to use of an authorization indicator. Accordingly, Sugiyama also does not teach or suggest every element of claim 1.

In summary, neither Nomura nor Sugiyama, taken alone or in combination, teaches or suggests every element of amended independent claim 1. Accordingly, claim 1 should be allowed. In addition, claims 2-7, which depend from claim 1, also should be allowed for at least the same reasons as claim 1.

B. Claims 9, 11-18, and 20-24

The Examiner rejected independent claims 9, 17, 20, and 22 as being obvious over a combination of Nomura and Sugiyama. As amended, independent claims 9, 17, 20 and 22 all recite suggesting an alternative printing characteristic if a user request is determined to be restricted. Neither Nomura nor Sugiyama teach making such a suggestion. The reasoning set forth above with respect to claim 1 thus applies.

Applicant traverses the rejection because neither of the cited references, taken alone or in combination, teaches or suggests every element of any of these independent claims. Accordingly, for at least this reason, independent claims 9, 17, 20, and 22 should be allowed. In addition, claims 11-16, 18, 21, 23, and 24 (which depend from claims 9, 17, 20, and 22) should be allowed for at least the same reasons as claims 9, 17, 20, and 22.

II. Conclusion

Applicant submits that this application is now in condition for allowance, in view of the above amendments and remarks. Accordingly, applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner issue a Notice of Allowability covering all of the pending claims. If the

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Examiner has any questions, or if a telephone interview would in any way advance prosecution of the application, please contact the undersigned attorney of record.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being facsimile transmitted to Examiner Y. Qin, Group Art Unit 2625, Commissioner for Patents, at facsimile number (571) 273-8300 on July 31, 2007.

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